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SUBJECT: SOUTHWEST CHINA: TIBETAN NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

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11. (SBU) Summary: According to local official media, ten thousand Tibetan middle school graduates students are to be given three-year government scholarships under the new "Sichuan Tibetan Areas Nine Plus Three Free Education Plan." The Tibetans will attend schools in Chinese-speaking parts of Sichuan Province. While initially focusing on vocational training, the proportion of places offered for regular high school programs that can lead to university training will also increase over the next several years. Prospective students will be screened for their political views as well as for health and Chinese language capability. Widespread unrest in Tibetan areas in March 2008, as well as the reported initial success of a pilot project with 300 students from Ganzi Prefecture in early 2009, apparently led to the rapid adoption of this program. End Summary.

Vocational Training Initiative

12. (U) The "Nine plus Three" plan offers places both to new middle school graduates and to any middle school graduate who will be under the age of 19 as of September 1, 2009. In its first year, the plan concentrates on vocational education, a constant focus of educational programs for Tibetans since their relative lack of facility in Chinese does not equip them for non-vocational tracks. According to a June 16 article in the Sichuan Province Party Committee newspaper Sichuan Ribao (article translated in full below), by 2013 there will be a significant increase in regular high school slots for Tibetans: "the province will accelerate the expansion of access to high school and raise the proportion of middle school students going on to high school to 95 percent. The proportion of student places at regular high schools and vocational high school will reach the ratio of 6:4." The students are to come from Tibetan areas in Aba Prefecture (5920 students), Ganzi Prefecture (over 4000 students), and Liangshan Prefecture (over 400 students). The Tibetan students will attend about 80 schools in non-Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province.

Qualifications for "Nine Plus Three" Include Political Criteria

13. (SBU) On June 18, the Sichuan Provincial government's Examination Committee issued a notice on the recruitment of Tibetan area students to schools in the interior (i.e. Han areas) of Sichuan Province. According to the official notice, students must actually be living at their place of household registration in ethnic Tibetan areas and be graduates of middle school with a clean criminal record, good health, unmarried, adequate level of Chinese language for study, interest in learning a specialty, and be under 19 years of age as of September 1, 2009. Recruiting schools should get information on

the ideology and character of students from the school they are applying from in their home area or, for students who have already graduated, from the local government office in charge of household registrations. Students who "oppose the principles of the PRC Constitution," or who do not change their views after receiving education, should not be enrolled. Students who have received fines or punishments from public security must report this with supporting documents from their local government including official opinions on the disposition of the case. Students are responsible for the authenticity of materials provided. Information on recruiting students and policies and procedures for this program will be announced on the website of the Sichuan Examination Institute at URL WWW.ZK789.NET

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14. (SBU) Sixty students from Ganzi Prefecture in western Sichuan are among the first group of 300 "Nine plus Three" program students to be sent to the city of Leshan (south of Chengdu). They began taking courses at a local vocational high school in March 2009 and were visited recently by the Sichuan media, including the Sichuan Party Committee's Sichuan Daily and local television. Reflecting widespread official attitudes, the article described how their Han Chinese teacher had "tamed the wild nature of the Tibetans" in just six classroom sessions. The article highlighted a photo essay on the fine school facilities the Tibetan students were enjoying and the kindness of their teacher, who invited them into her home for dinners on weekends.

Possible Response to Unrest and Unemployed Youth in Tibetan Areas

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15. (SBU) With highly subsidized development programs transforming the two Sichuan largely ethnic Tibetan prefectures of Ganzi and Aba, including a program for the resettlement of Tibetan nomads, the Chinese leadership may be trying to respond to the potential problem of what to do with nomads once they have been resettled. Large numbers of unemployed youth could cause social instability. The education plan may represent a "feeling for the rocks as one crosses the stream" response to that concern. Assimilation of ethnic Tibetans to Chinese culture appears well advanced in some Tibetan areas, including southern Aba Prefecture in Sichuan and northwest Yunnan, but not in Ganzi Prefecture and pastoral areas of western Sichuan or in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).

Building on an Old Idea

16. (SBU) The new education initiative likely builds on the experience of a similar program for students from the TAR that began in 1985. Since then, some Tibetan elementary school and junior high school graduates from the TAR have been mainstreamed into regular Chinese language high schools. Tibetan high schools or special programs for TAR students within regular high schools are found in a number of cities across China. The children of Tibetan Communist Party and government cadres and some high scoring rural students attend the best Tibetan programs in Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing. There are also Tibetan high school programs or schools in Wuhan, Chongqing, Chengdu and other cities. According to regulations on the management of Tibetan high schools in the Chinese interior that were promulgated by the State Education Commission in 1989, Tibetan high schools aim primarily to promote Chinese language skills, but also to "strengthen" Tibetan language skills. Schools were ordered to place special stress on ideological work

and assign a person dedicated specifically to that task. Heavy emphasis is also placed on political education, including patriotic education and "education on the unity of Chinese nationalities."

17. (SBU) Ethnic Tibetan students with excellent Chinese prior to university reportedly stand a good chance of succeeding academically. However, Tibetans who have not had intensive Chinese training in a Chinese-speaking environment and get into good Chinese universities, sometimes with the help of bonus points for minority students, receive little remedial help and often are unable to complete their coursework. While some individual Tibetans from Ganzi and Aba Prefectures in the past received scholarships, this is the first time Sichuan Province has attempted such a comprehensive program similar in scale to what is done in the TAR. The Sichuan Province "Nine Plus Three" Tibetan student program will enroll ten thousand students each year for three-year programs. As noted by one local contact, 30,000 students will represent a significant proportion of annual middle school graduates in Tibetan areas of Sichuan, perhaps as much as half of all Tibetan middle school students in Aba this fall.

18. (SBU) It is unclear if this educational program can actually reduce social disruptions that will likely accompany Sichuan Province's multi-billion dollar development plans for Tibetan areas, including the Chengdu to Lhasa railway line to be completed in ten years that will open the area wider to the outside world than ever before. Many Tibetans also retain a strong ethnic Tibetan identity despite a Chinese education and achieving native speaker fluency in Chinese. One of China's most famous Tibetan authors, Woeser, writes exclusively in Chinese. Encounters with ethnic Han prejudices against Tibetans in schools in ethnic Han areas may strengthen Tibetan identities. In a widely copied article posted on the internet, "I'm a Tibetan, I'll Fight Anyone Who Insults Our Nationality", one anonymous Tibetan high school student complained of the foul insults Tibetans at schools throughout China have endured from ethnic Han classmates over the past year. The student concluded with the statement "Atheists have no business judging our Tibetan religion."

19. (U) Consulate translation of June 16 Sichuan Daily article Sichuan in September Will Inaugurate Full Scale Tibetan Areas "Nine Plus Three" Education Plan:

[Sichuan Daily (Sichuan Province Communist Party Committee newspaper in Chinese) June 16, 2009]

Ten Thousand Tibetan Area Students Will Study at High Schools and Vocational Schools this Fall

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(article by Sichuan Daily journalist Zhang Shoushuai) This Fall, Sichuan Province will send over 10,000 ethnic Tibetan students to high schools and vocational schools in interior areas of Sichuan for a free education. This journalist learned from the Sichuan Province Education Bureau on June 14 that, beginning September 2009, Sichuan Province will inaugurate its full-scale "Nine Plus Three" Free Education Plan. The Bureau has already designated 80 schools at the provincial level or higher key high schools and vocational schools as schools that will be implementing this plan.

In order to help peasants and herders escape poverty and in order to develop the high quality workforce and technically trained people needed for the social and economic development of the Tibetan areas, Sichuan Province in March 2009 organized the first group of 300 students from Ganzi Prefecture to study at five key vocational schools. This project elicited a very favorable response. Zhongbu is a member of that first group of students who went to study in the interior of Sichuan who is now at the Second Vocational High School in Renshou County. Zongbu

noted; "being able to come to the interior to study for free ignited dreams in my heart." The school provides bedding, daily necessities, a school uniform, and 300 RMB/month in living expenses to each student. Jide, a parent, said; "this state policy is very good. Now we all want to send our children to the outside to study."

Government subsidies for ethnic Tibetan students going to the interior for three years of high school study comes to a total subsidy of RMB 20,000 for each student. This includes free tuition of RMB 2000, a living expenses subsidy of RMB 3000 per year for the first two years, and an additional RMB 1500 subsidy for the third year (the balance is made up of compensation earned in work-study and work practicum). There is also a RMB 1500 annual subsidy that covers transportation, dormitory, books and miscellaneous expenses.

Sichuan Province has announced that by 2013, in addition to fully implementing nine years of compulsory education in all ethnic Tibetan areas of the province, it will arrange for schooling at high schools and vocational schools in the interior for 10,000 children of peasants and herders. The province will accelerate the expansion of access to high school and raise the proportion of middle school students going on to high school to 95 percent and the proportion of student places at regular high schools and vocational high school will reach the ratio of 6:4. Therefore the Sichuan Province Education Bureau organized the "Tibetan Areas "Nine Plus Three" Free Vocational Education At High Schools and Vocational Schools in the Interior Expert Leading Committee, which is charged with selecting 68 specialties and 169 specialty development tracks suited for Tibetan students that will be provided as suggestions to the high schools and vocational schools recruiting Tibetan students, and to assist that school adjust their plans for recruiting students for various specialties.

According to preliminary statistics, at present, of those ethnic Tibetan students who intend to study at high schools this Fall in interior Sichuan, there are 5920 from Aba Prefecture, over 4000 from Ganzi Prefecture, and over 400 from Liangshan Prefecture. This shows the great effort put into to developing new talent for the ethnic Tibetan areas.

The pace of economic and social development in a region depends to a large extent upon its human talent. Sichuan Province in implementing the Tibetan Areas "Nine Plus Three" Free Education Plan, will enable Tibetans to get a high quality vocational education in the interior. This is putting much effort into developing new talent for the Tibetan areas and is an important measure for providing human talents and construction of the new socialist pastoral areas. This policy has the enthusiastic support of the great majority of peasants and herders and will promote the rapid economic and social development of Sichuan Province's ethnic Tibetan areas.

This is the first year of the full implementation of the Sichuan Province's Tibetan Areas "Nine Plus Three" Free Education Plan. Scientific, effective implementation of this project for the people's livelihood will be important for the development of the "Virtuous Government Project".

Every level and every department of government should strengthen leadership, make plans to be more concrete, lay stress on essentials according to what is needed for the successful implementation of Sichuan Province's Tibetan Areas "Nine Plus Three" Free Education Project. Moreover, every sector in society should with real actions show their concern for the studies and growth of the ethnic Tibetan students and create a good environment in which they can live and study.

Source: Sichuan Ribao at
<http://epaper.xplus.com/papers/scrb/20090615/n1.shtml>

10. (U) Online References Collated by Consulate General Chengdu:

-- Sichuan Educational Testing Committee notice (2009) 55 on recruiting students to high schools and vocational schools under the Sichuan Province Tibetan Areas "9+3"High School and Vocational School Free Temporary Guidelines" Education online at URL tinyurl.com/tibet-scholarships-sichuan .

-- Sichuan Province Examination Institute website www.zk789.net .

-- PRC State Education Commission March 1989 Temporary Regulations on the Management of Tibet High School Courses of Study in the Chinese Interior at URL tinyurl.com/TibetanHSregs .

-- Web report with photos on some of the first group of "Nine Plus Three" Tibetan students at a high school in Leshan. URL at tinyurl.com/leshan-wild-tibetans .

-- A Tibetan at a Chinese high school complains about attitudes of Han students towards Tibetans "I'm a Tibetan, I'll Fight Anyone Who Insults Our Nationality"

at URL tinyurl.com/Tibetan-student-writes .
BOUGHNER